

Guidelines for Student Identification / Selection of Exhibition Topics

Rhode Island Department of Education

Explanation and Considerations for Use

Student choice is a critical part of a successful exhibition experience. However, the process of choosing a topic can sometimes be overwhelming. This tool provides a number of recommended strategies and prompts that a supportive adult can use to help students select an appropriate topic.

This is guidance issued by the Rhode Island Department of Education. Rhode Island schools should carefully consider these materials when they develop their exhibition system.

This tool was created and/or compiled by The Rhode Island Department of Education and The Education Alliance at Brown University, with the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/highschoolreform/dslat/>
October, 2005



Guidelines for Student Identification / Selection of Exhibition Topics

It is not uncommon for students in high school, college, and even graduate school to struggle with the identification of a topic for extended inquiry. Helping a student to navigate the complex process of topic identification requires the direct interaction with, and support of, an adult. This type of structured relationship is an example of **personalization** and illustrates the interrelatedness of the three areas of the Regents' High School Regulations (Literacy, Graduation by Proficiency, School Restructuring/Personalization). Below are some suggestions for fostering student identification and choice in the selection of an Exhibition topic. These interactions might be built into an advisor/advisee system or a required or elective course dedicated to Exhibitions. The strategies should be included in a Student Exhibition Guidebook.

Student Choice

Student choice is at the center of an exhibition project. The student needs to take the opportunity to reflect on what will sustain his/her interest and challenge them throughout the exhibition process. A **required element** of a PBGR exhibition is that it be drawn from student interest.

Some guiding questions / prompts that may be used to help students focus on an exhibition topic include:

- What have you always wanted to know more about or learn how to do?
- What career or personal interest do you want to explore? What interests you?
- What skill set/certification are you interested in acquiring (e.g., EMT certification, real estate license, nursing certification)?
- What are your goals or your dreams?
- What event or activity can you imagine yourself planning?
- What is an issue or problem that you've encountered (in school, in the community, etc.)?
- What problem can you imagine yourself solving?
- What system, product, or service can you see yourself designing or improving?
- Whose accomplishments do you admire? What can you imagine yourself doing that might emulate their accomplishments?

Some suggestions that may be used to help students focus on an exhibition topic include:

- Choose a topic that relates to your life.
- Make a list of possible topics and consider and weigh each, asking yourself, "Is this something I can stick with?"
- Ask family, friends, and teachers for input.
- Leave ample time to reflect on and select your topic. (Don't wait until the last minute!)

Suggestions for Refining Student's Choice

As a student begins to hone in on a topic, there are other considerations that come into play. Again, helping a student to navigate this complex topic will require some mentoring and assistance from an adult. Below are some strategies for helping a student refine his/her selection and evaluate it against some criteria that guide topic selection.

While considering your topic, you must also consider the following:

- Learning stretch, learning reach, or path to new knowledge: What you know now has to be elaborated upon and developed significantly during the completion of the exhibition project. For example, what skills or knowledge will you gain as a result of working on the exhibition project? How will this challenge you as a learner and a person?
- Cost: All of the financial aspects of the exhibition project are your responsibility. Can you cover the costs?
- Feasibility: Do you have the time and resources to complete the exhibition project?
- Parent/guardian approval: Have you discussed all of the elements of your project with your parents or guardians? Do they support your decision? Are they willing to give written approval of your topic?
- Safety: Have you considered the potential risks involved in completing this exhibition project? Have you discussed this with your parents/guardians?
- Relevance of topic to all exhibition components: Is your topic comprehensive enough to fulfill all of the required elements of the exhibition project? How do these components support and relate to your topic?
- Alignment with applied learning, content, or industry standards: Have you found the appropriate applied learning, state/national content standards, or industry standards that your project will align with?
- Mentor/advisor: Have you considered which adult can help you with this project? Does s/he have expertise in or is s/he familiar with the area of your project? Is this person a good match for your personality and work style? Does s/he have enough time to work with you? Have you considered how you'll approach this person to ask him/her to work with you? Has this person agreed to work with you?

Proposal

Students must write a proposal / letter of intent for approval of topic describing the focus of the proposed exhibition, the learning stretch inherent in work on the exhibition topic, the work plan for completing the exhibition, and the supplies needed to do the exhibition project. Students should be provided with appropriate rubrics and/or criteria to guide their work.

School Responsibility

The school will guide students through the topic selection process and account for all appropriate documentation in a timely manner. The school will notify students whether their project proposal has been approved.

- Parental/guardian approval: The school must provide consent forms to the student for securing parental/guardian knowledge and approval of the exhibition topic. The school must also collect, record, and retain signed parental/guardian consent forms for all students.
- Legal: The school will guide students to ensure that their topics are within legal and age-appropriate limits.
- Student can financially support project: It is the student's responsibility to cover all costs of his/her project. The school is not responsible for any costs incurred by the student for the exhibition project. Schools might consider setting a maximum allowable budget for an exhibition project to reduce potential inequity.
- Approval of learning stretch: Schools must provide the support and structures necessary to verify that the student's topic has enough depth and breadth to provide a learning stretch for the individual student.
- Assistance (when needed) in finding mentor/advisor: In the event that a student has been unable to secure a mentor/advisor, the school can provide additional guidance. The school must also collect, record, and retain mentor/advisor consent forms from all students.
- Modeling: School must provide a model of how to select a topic during the selection process
- Waivers: Schools must provide waivers / forms for any student materials or photos that will be used / distributed to the public.